



*Our Vision:*  
A future in which children are safe, families are stable and communities are strong.

# 2011 Child Welfare Services Annual Report

## Montgomery County, Maryland



# 2011 CHILD WELFARE SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

**OUR VISION:** A future where children are safe, families are stable and communities are strong.

**MISSION STATEMENT:** To protect children, preserve families, strengthen communities, ensure permanency and well-being for every abused and neglected child in Montgomery County.

**GOALS:**

- Provide family-focused, community-oriented services that adhere to national standards of best practice and result in positive outcomes for children and families
- Advocate for essential services to children and families
- Create a work environment that attracts and retains competent and diverse staff and promotes professional development and leadership

**APPROACH:** Child Welfare Services advocates an integrated service strategy to assure the safety and well-being of children, youth and families.

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## ***CHILD WELFARE SERVICES DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE***

This has been another challenging year for Child Welfare Services. Many families experienced economic hardships resulting in a higher than usual number of complex cases needing a variety of services. Our dedicated staff responded with intensive efforts to protect children, support families, and provide necessary services. Child Welfare continues to be a key member of the Montgomery County Health and Human Services team and a strong partner of the Maryland Department of Human Resources.

A major focus continued to be on Family Centered Practice (FCP) resulting in more children being kept at home with supportive services, an increase in the number of children living with relatives, fewer children living in group homes, and an increase in the number of children who were adopted.

Family Involvement Meetings (FIM), during which the family gathers with others who are a part of their support system, increased in number and were highly successful. Staff worked hard to find family members to help care for children. As a result of these family meetings, more relatives and community members were available to provide support to parents.

*The Visitation House*, supported by Montgomery County government and the legal community, continued to serve an increasing number of children separated from their families and enabled them to visit in a homelike atmosphere. Several fathers' support group meetings were held at *The Visitation House* with a focus on engaging fathers with their children.

A few highlights from the past year include: an increasing number of children living with their own families, relatives or foster families; a 48% decrease in the number of children in group homes; and a 50% increase in the number of finalized adoptions.

Our diverse and highly dedicated staff and our strong community partnerships are the keys to our successful work with vulnerable children and youth. In the coming year, we will continue to increase our emphasis on family-centered practice strategies and outreach to communities, intensify our attempts to find relatives, and expand our efforts to identify new foster and adoptive parents. We are committed to maintaining children in their homes as much as possible and to providing high quality services to families in an effort to keep Montgomery County's children safe from abuse and neglect.

*Agnes Farkas Leshner*

Director  
Child Welfare Services

## THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Child Welfare Services (CWS) is a complex system offering a wide range of services to assess and ensure child safety and well-being. Social workers conduct assessments to determine first, whether an intervention is needed and then, the most appropriate intervention. In some situations there is no need for services and the case can be closed. In other situations services are provided by a community agency. If problems are considered serious but the child can remain in the home, social workers provide in-home services and regularly visit the family. If children cannot safely remain in their home, they are temporarily placed with relatives or with a foster family. If over time, it is clear that reunification with parents is not possible, permanent placement with a relative or an adoptive family becomes an alternative. Having a safe, permanent living arrangement is the ultimate goal for all children.

## SERVICES WE PROVIDE

**The Screening Unit** is the single point of entry for all Child Welfare cases. During the past fiscal year, they received a total of 8,747 telephone calls - an increase of over 2% compared to the previous year. Social Workers in this unit receive calls from citizens and professionals in our community, as well as calls from other state agencies seeking assistance with child maltreatment and family problems. Social workers evaluate each referral to determine if there is a need for an investigation/assessment of the maltreatment allegation and/or refer the callers to other community services to assist the family.

Five **Assessment Units** investigate allegations of physical and sexual child abuse and neglect, and then evaluate the need for services to ensure child safety and promote family preservation. This past year, social workers investigated 2,599 families, about the same as the previous year. Of that number, neglect investigations/allegations accounted for 55% of the total, while 33% were physical abuse, 12% were sexual abuse, and less than 1% were due to mental injury. The social workers also conducted 245 assessments for other jurisdictions and the Courts.

## SERVICES TO FAMILIES

Family Preservation Services were provided to many families when abused or neglected children remained in their homes. These services are intensive, home-based, and time-limited. There were 251 children served and 99% of the children remained safely in their homes and did not require an out-of-home placement. In addition, Montgomery County has a Family Preservation program through a contract with the Montgomery County Collaboration Council. The program served 58 families and was highly successful in keeping children in their homes.

CWS also provided less intensive, in-home services to an average of 170 families each month. These services are offered to families when abuse or neglect occurred, yet imminent danger is no longer deemed to be present. Social workers monitored these homes for the continued safety of these children by visiting the family regularly and offering other services.

### Foster Care

Foster Care is part of the *continuum of safety* net for children who are abused or neglected and thus unable to remain safely in their homes. This temporary "Out of Home Care" allows the family (or responsible guardians), along with an assigned social worker, to improve conditions leading to safety concerns. The social workers provide case management and reunification services. The goal is to reduce the time that children remain out of their homes. If reunification is not possible, the social worker explores other permanent living arrangements for the children. The social worker's ultimate plan, in conjunction with the family, is to have each child in a stable, permanent placement (home and family) that allows the child to grow and become a healthy, productive citizen who can contribute positively to society.

Montgomery County Child Welfare Services (MCCWS) continues to participate in the State of Maryland's Department of Human Resource project; "Place Matters" which stresses indicators for each jurisdiction that help reduce the number of children in foster care. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2011, MCCWS reduced the number of children in care from an average of 550 to 514 per month - a decrease of 7%. Furthermore, early involvement and intervention with a family's natural supports, such as their extended family, friends and community members, encouraged prevention and reduction in the number of children entering foster care.

## **Kinship Care**

Living with relatives is a strong consideration for children who are removed from their parents to ensure their safety. The Kinship Care Program continued to grow and is a central feature of our Family Centered Practice (FCP) Initiative. In this program, vigorous efforts are made to identify and locate willing and able relatives to care for children who have been seriously maltreated and must be temporarily removed from their parents. Relatives provide “kinship care” to these children and are supported through one-on-one case management, Kinship Caregiver Support groups, as well as assistance in navigating the social services system to access appropriate services for the care of their relative children. Kinship caregivers are also assisted through an intensive training and evaluation process in order to become “Restricted Foster Parents” and they can then receive the foster care stipend.

There was a 28% increase in Kinship placements this last year, with more than 125 children a month being cared for by relative caregivers, ensuring that they could remain within their families instead of being placed with unfamiliar foster families. The overriding factor leading to children being removed from their parents’ care was parental substance abuse leading to neglect (78%). More than half (61%) of children removed were under the age of 5 years, while another 27% were between the ages of 6 - 11 years. Most caregivers were grandparents or aunts/uncles (58%). Thirty per cent of children were successfully reunified with their parents within an average of 12 months; 40% remained with their relatives who were given permanent custody and guardianship by the Juvenile Court in an average of 18 months; and 30% of the children had their permanency plans changed to Adoption by their relative caregiver in an average of 15 months.

The State of Maryland strengthened the Guardianship Assistance Program, increasing the guardianship subsidy to equal the foster care stipend and also expanding the definition of “kinship” to include non-related caregivers who have a strong kinship bond with the child. This led to more children exiting the system, as their caregivers received greater financial support to permanently raise these children. There was a 75% increase in the number of children exiting care to permanent custody and guardianship, with 35 children leaving the oversight of Child Welfare Services and the Juvenile Court to live permanently with their relatives this past year.

## **Kinship Navigator Services Program**

The Kinship Navigator Services Program is a Maryland Department of Human Resources, grant-supported program in partnership with the University of Maryland School of Social Work. The focus of this program was to compare case-management services in an informal kinship program that provided ‘information only’ with no Departmental involvement.

- Twenty-three families received information and referrals to providers in order to access services which could be maintained without Departmental involvement. Child Welfare staff provided information without case-management services.
- Seventeen families received full case-management services including referrals for medical, emergency and mental health services, food stamps, help navigating the public school system, and assistance seeking guardianship. These kinship caregivers had the opportunity to attend a support group enabling them to both seek and offer information, and also lend support to fellow kinship caregivers in similar situations.

The University of Maryland School of Social Work will evaluate this program upon its completion in June 2012.

## **Foster and Adoptive Families**

Last year there was a monthly average of 280 approved foster and adoptive homes. Foster Family Recruitment meetings were held each month in Rockville and other parts of the County; and were attended by a total of 186 prospective foster parents. There were 82 home-studies initiated and 42 new resource families were licensed.

## **Treatment Foster Care**

Treatment foster families provided a home environment for children with special needs. Twenty families received intensive training to serve children with serious health and/or mental health problems including behaviors that are difficult to manage. Social workers monitored an average of 103 children each month in specialized/treatment foster homes. Many children were placed with private agencies specialized in licensing therapeutic foster home providers.

The Treatment Foster Care Program of Montgomery County continued to be one of the only successful public Treatment Foster Care programs in the State of Maryland. The program has proven to be a significant cost-saving measure in comparison to private Treatment Foster Care programs. Our Treatment Foster Care program provides the same level of treatment and oversight to serious emotionally fragile, medically and behavioral disordered children. The program increased foster parent capacity by 27% during the previous year.

## **Adoption**

There were 51 finalized adoptions (a 50% increase over last year), including several sibling groups and teenagers. There was a monthly average of 65 children who had a permanency plan of adoption and most of these children were in pre-adoptive homes. Barriers to adoption finalizations included children with severe psychological and behavioral problems that made it challenging to find adoptive resources. There was also ambivalence on the part of both families and children to commit to adoption - even when supportive services were provided. Children 10 years of age and older must agree to be adopted in order to finalize adoption. The new state-sponsored Subsidized Guardianship Program resulted in more families choosing that program over adoption.

## **Independent Living**

More than 70 youth were served in the Independent Living Program during FY 2011. Guided by the principles of the State "Youth Matters" initiative, social workers aimed to improve youth engagement in all aspects of service planning. The Maryland Youth Transitional Plan was developed to track youth progress on benchmarks in service areas. CWS staff celebrated the high school graduation of 26 youth in this year's program and of these young people, 14 of them enrolled in college.

The program continued to improve the outcomes for all youth exiting the foster care system. In addition to more youth-centered service planning, the Department increased the number of Family Involvement Meetings to help transition planning and they also increased family finding efforts to connect more youth with extended family and significant support persons.

To help prepare youth for employment and job readiness, the Department entered into a contract with Arbor Employment Services to establish the Arbor Foster Youth Employment Program. Youth advocates were assigned to work individually with teens to assess their aptitudes, assist them with job readiness skills and seek employment opportunities in their field of interest. In addition, with a grant from the Trawick Foundation, the Maryland Multicultural Youth Center provided support toward job placement for transitioning youth. This program provided these young people with summer employment opportunities. In all, 43 youth were referred for specialized employment services; 26 completed the program.

## **The Tree House Child Assessment Center (CAC)**

The Tree House Child Assessment Center (CAC) of Montgomery County, Maryland, serves child and adolescent victims of sexual and physical abuse, and neglect, and their non-offending family members. This public-private partnership between the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Primary Care Coalition of Montgomery County (PCC) provides an array of integrated services including forensic interviewing, pediatric medical evaluations, nurse case management, mental health assessments and ongoing therapy, and victim advocacy in a safe, child-friendly and central location. Primary funding is obtained through DHHS, and supplemented by federal and local grants, foundations, and donations. Management and advisory support is provided by The Tree House Operations Board and a Community Council.

The Tree House works collaboratively with The Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Police/Family Crimes Division, Office of the County Attorney, and the State's Attorney's Office. This multidisciplinary team approach seeks to decrease the overall impact of abuse by minimizing the further trauma of children having to discuss their maltreatment on multiple occasions and to help victims begin the healing process.

During FY 2011, The Tree House provided 3,464 services to 880 victims of abuse or neglect, including 744 new and 136 ongoing clients. Sexual abuse victims comprised 58% of new clients, while 17% were seen for physical abuse, 23% for neglect, and 2% for foster care exams., The majority of clients seen were female (67%), and age ranges for all clients were 0-6 (26%), 7-12 (22%), 13-17 (20%), and 18 and older (31%).

## **Budget and Administration**

The FY 2011 budget for Child Welfare Services was \$21,525,000. The Maryland Department of Human Resources (MDDHR) provided approximately 70% and Montgomery County funds contributed approximately 30% of the total budget. In addition to funds designated for personnel and operating expenses, MDDHR provided flexible and/or special purpose funds for a variety of services, such as eviction prevention, psychological evaluations, preparing youth for independent living, child care for foster parents and relative caretakers, court-ordered services, foster/adoptive parent recruitment and retention efforts, and adoption promotion.

Many services, particularly mental health services for children and parents, were made possible by funding from outside Child Welfare Services. For example, the Mental Health Core Service Agency made resources available for in-home crisis intervention/stabilization services and for attachment and bonding studies for young children. County funds were used for community education, specialized services such as home-based crisis services, service coordination, parenting skills training, and post-adoption services to prevent adoption disruption. In FY 2011, Child Welfare Services managed twenty-three (23) contracts that totaled over \$2,000,000

## **Legal Activities**

The Office of the County Attorney, Division of Health and Human Services, continued to provide legal representation for CWS. This unit consists of staff and contract attorneys, paralegals, and legal secretaries. Montgomery County remains the only county in the state to have a legal team co-located with CWS. This team represents CWS in Juvenile Court, during mediations and in administrative appeals. In addition, the attorneys served as general counsel to the CWS administrators, participated in weekly case reviews with child welfare staff and prepared social workers to testify. The attorneys provided regular legal training programs for CWS staff, foster parents, and kinship providers. Each year one of these trainings involves a review of recent legislative changes and the impact on CWS practices. The attorneys also represented the Director of the Tree House, Montgomery County's Child Assessment Center, and they participated in multi-disciplinary team (MDT) case reviews. In addition, the attorneys participated in the Children's Action Team (CAT) headed by Judge Katherine Savage and the Juvenile Court's Mediation Oversight Committee.

FY 2011 saw a slight increase in new Children In Need of Assistance (CINA) petitions filed in the Juvenile Court as well as an increase in the number of Juvenile Court hearings that were held. The CWS Court Liaison continued to maintain an office in the Juvenile Court. The Court Liaison plays a critical role by drafting the court petitions and facilitating communication between the Court staff, judges, CWS staff and the DHHS legal team.

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PAST YEAR**

### **Family Centered Practice**

It has long been known that children thrive when living with families; therefore, there continued to be a strong emphasis on family connections during the past year. We maintained children and youth at home whenever possible, reunited children with their parents when feasible, and found substitute families, particularly relatives, when the children's own parents could not care for them safely.

Family Involvement Meetings (FIM), a collaborative effort to ensure the safety and well-being of children includes family members, agency staff, service providers, community members, foster parents, members of the family's support network and (if age appropriate), the child is also included in placement decisions. FIM meetings are convened at key decision points over the course of a child's case such as:

- When out of home placement has been recommended;
- When changes in the child's permanency plan occurs;
- When a youth is recommended for Independent Living.

In FY 2011, 380 FIMs were held relating to 579 children. Satisfaction surveys from biological family members, community partners, social workers, and supervisors indicate continuing support for these meetings.

## **Family Finding**

The Family Finding Program is an evidence-based, structured model used in locating relatives of children and youth involved with Montgomery County's Child Welfare Services. This program's focus is to search for possible lifelong connections to increase the likelihood of a stable family for every child. Frequently, family members are found as permanent resources as they develop caring relationships and provide much needed emotional stability for these children. The adults are supported in decisions regarding their involvement in these children's lives. The model includes *Family Search and Engagement (FSE)*; a set of six steps designed to locate, engage, connect, and support family resources for youth. This process aims to provide increased permanency plans for children in foster care. In FY 2011, the Family Finding Program worked with 49 youth and their families in an effort to make permanent connections. Over 50% of the youth referred have been connected to a relative or fictive kin. Since the program's inception in March 2010, at least one resource has been located for each of the 116 youth referred.

## **Continuous Quality Improvement Activities**

Child Welfare's Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Council and Standing Committees (Training, Cultural Competence, Stakeholders and CHESSIE) were maintained during the past year, and CWS also participated in the DHHS Performance and Quality Improvement Council.

CQI continued to serve as a vital part of the Child Welfare system by advocating for employee-suggested improvements, enhancing communication between frontline staff and various levels of management, and strengthening employee morale. The CQI Council manages the Department's standing committees' progress and Ombudsperson activities. A great deal of time and effort on the part of individuals, committees, and the Administration have gone into enhancing best practices, enhancing service delivery, and improving employee morale. The CQI Council responded to Requests for Action (RFA), helped to address training needs, and continued to meet accreditation expectations.

CQI Council's support of Child Welfare Services goals included the following activities:

- Introduction of the *How-To-Do* electronic manual for Child Welfare Services staff; this manual provides departmental information and is used to give direction to new and current staff when completing specific tasks;
- Supported the re-development of the Secondary Trauma Team which served as ongoing support to the staff;
- Distributed Quarterly Service Awards to highlight the accomplishments of individual staff, units and teams within Child Welfare Services who do outstanding work;
- Helped to improve accountability and the completion of specific work activities that improve the daily functioning of Child Welfare Services.

## **The Visitation House**

The Visitation House provides a home-like atmosphere for supervised visitation for parents, children and siblings. The House was a project between various departments of Montgomery County government (Health and Human Services, Housing and Community Affairs, and the County Attorney), the Courts, the legal community and various community agencies. The Children's Action Team (CAT) provided additional support for the House and its operations. In FY 2011, more than 200 children had 1,404 visits at the Visitation House. There were 2,297 hours of visits scheduled at the Visitation House this year. In addition, both Foster Parent training and the Responsible Fathers groups held regular meetings there.

## **Maryland Children Electronic Social Services Information Exchange (MD CHESSIE)**

MD CHESSIE, the statewide automated CWS system that enables the tracking of children and facilitates information sharing, continued to be utilized by child welfare staff across the State to maintain client service history and contact information. The electronic database allows workers to share cases locally and across jurisdictions, and it makes information readily available to all workers involved in the case. The system also allows the local Department and DHR to monitor caseloads and actual spending, as CHESSIE is used to generate Child Welfare payments. During FY 2011, the local department and DHR increasingly relied upon CHESSIE-generated data rather than manually-collected data to monitor achievement of outcomes and Place Matters performance measures.

Representatives from Montgomery County and many other jurisdictions, as well as DHR, participated in a workgroup, called the Tiger Team, which continued to focus on improving CHESSIE functioning. Due to budget constraints however, funding for previously prioritized MD CHESSIE enhancements was eliminated and scheduled enhancements to the database had to be postponed. During the year, a limited number of improvements were implemented, programming logic was improved in several functional areas, and data entry errors were corrected. There was one major enhancement implemented in FY 2011.

NYTD Enhancement – the National Youth in Transition Database requires that states collect information about each youth who receives Independent Living services that are paid for and/or provided by the State. The database requires that states collect demographic and outcome data on certain youth in foster care whom the state follows over time, while continuing to collect outcome data. An enhancement in MD CHESSIE now allows Maryland’s child welfare workers to collect this data and contribute it to the national database.

## **Mental Health Services**

Montgomery County continued to fund six therapists to provide specialized in-home services for children and families in the Child Welfare system. The Home Based Team (HBT) worked with 68 families; touching the lives of 118 children. Treatment focused on assisting children and adults to overcome mental health difficulties and resolve trauma related to child abuse and neglect. This year all therapists received training in Motivational Interviewing. These therapists, co-located with Child Welfare staff in the Piccard and Germantown office buildings, provided direct services, consultation and progress reports. Three of the HBT staff are Spanish speaking.

## **Social Work Student Training**

Montgomery County is a site for the IV-E Multicultural Unit which is an expansion of our Social Work Field Instruction Program. Through collaboration with the University of Maryland School of Social Work along with DHR, this program develops child welfare competencies in a multicultural group of student social workers and prepares them for work in a public agency. The mission of the unit is to develop the knowledge and skills of graduate social work students in working with clients of diverse backgrounds and experiences. The unit’s first five students had a very positive experience and the Department successfully recruited three graduating MSW students, all fluent in Spanish, to become full-time employees. In addition to the IV-E unit, 12 social work students started internships within the Department.

## **Responsible Fathers Program**

Both the Responsible Fathers and the Winning Fathers programs continued to provide services to fathers, families and children involved in Child Welfare Services. These two Fatherhood programs have the same overall goal - to enhance the relationship of fathers with their children, but the focus is on two different populations:

- The Winning Fathers program’s primary goal was to improve the success of fathers re-entering the community after being incarcerated.
- The Responsible Fathers program worked to enhance fathers’ involvement with their children.

These programs provided an array of services including Parenting Classes, Relationship Classes, Economic Stability Classes as well as one-to-one Counseling. Both programs provided support for fathers and their families in navigating barriers to successful involvement with their children. The Winning Fathers Program was awarded this year’s National Association of Counties award and both programs continued to develop successful working relationships with various County departments including the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) and Workforce Solutions Group (WSG) to provide services to fathers and their families. Throughout the year the Winning Fathers and Responsible Fathers programs provided services to over 200 fathers and their families.

## **Transitioning Youth to Families**

With the help of the Casey Foundation, the Department focused on integrating services to improve outcomes for youth placed in group homes who are encountering challenges in reunification or in transitioning to family settings. We developed a strategy to identify and assess youth and family barriers to reunification and locate resources necessary for a successful “step down” from group to family. This “readiness tool” helped to prioritize youth and their families who had likelihood of success in this transition. FIMs further identified the commitment of the family and the need for the Department to pursue targeted recruitment. An internal review process and tracking system identified trends and promising practices.

The Casey Foundation provided training to staff focusing on youth involvement in finding family members and these practices have been incorporated in FIMs, court review hearings, and treatment team planning meetings - all with good results. Thirty-five percent of youth whose cases were reviewed successfully stepped down to trial home visits (reunification), semi-independent living and placements with foster families. This is a continuing process which requires the commitment of the youth, families, providers, the community and the Department.

### **Safe & Stable Families**

Through a grant from MDDHR, CWS established an evidence-based model of intervention for adolescents who are “hard to manage” by their parents and are at risk for out-of-home placement. The Safe & Stable Families program offers intensive in-home interventions beginning with an assessment of the child’s environment and the family’s functioning to establish a service plan incorporating the values of safety and well-being into the service delivery. The targets of these interventions were adolescents who have been referred to CWS with serious “out of control” behaviors and whose parents lack the skills and knowledge to advocate for mental health, educational, and social services necessary to stabilize the crisis. The focus was on improved family functioning, maintaining youth in their communities, and reinforcing the family system so that youth can safely remain with their families. The Safe & Stable Families program worked with 78 children in 64 families during the past year.

### **Post Adoption Services**

To enhance the success of adoptive placements in Montgomery County, the Post Adoption Initiative - a collaborative partnership with the Center for Adoption Support and Education (CASE) - provided a wide range of specialized mental health and support services to adopted children and their families. Through individual, family and group counseling, along with parent educational/support services, participants learned to resolve issues after adoption. During FY 2011, the program served 55 children and families preventing adoption dissolution and promoting the emotional well-being of these children and their families. Parents and children reported positive outcomes and there has been a reduction in adoption-related adjustment issues.

### **Early Childhood Programs**

Partnerships with Infants & Toddlers, Head Start and other programs have been successful in facilitating early evaluation and intervention for children with developmental disabilities. These trans-disciplinary approaches start with rapid assessment and services often take place in the home. Children and parents benefit from the skills gained, socialization and a gained knowledge of available community resources. Collaboration with the Head Start program assures that eligible children are enrolled in preschool programs to better prepare them for elementary education. This year, the issues of educational surrogates and confidentiality related to the Infant & Toddlers evaluations resulted in revising policies and procedures to facilitate services for CWS children and families.

### **Citizens Review Boards and Panel**

Community members serve on two review boards: one appointed by the Governor’s Office and the second by the County Executive. Four Citizens Review Boards, all appointed by the Governor, review a random selection of cases each month. Their focus this year was on cases where permanent placements were delayed. The results of the case reviews were presented to Child Welfare managers and to the Court.

The members of the Citizens Review Panel examined mental health services to children records of health and records of mental health services to children. The Panel members helped to develop an action plan towards improving an assortment of service delivery components. For example, a new procedure was introduced to assure that foster parents know how to contact the child’s social worker, supervisor, child’s attorney, and other significant people in the child’s case.

### **Community Education**

Community Education continued to be a valuable project during the past year. There were 38 presentations attended by more than 850 people. This included 10 new organizations who requested informational workshops and the development of two new booklets focusing on the problems of sexual abuse and parenting difficult teens. From these presentation, 39 people requested information on how to become a foster parent.

## STAFFING

Recruitment and retention of staff continued to be a major challenge during the past year. Twenty-six new professional staff were hired to replace individuals who left for professional or personal reasons. Exit interviews identified that the highly stressful nature of the work was the leading reason people left and personal reasons (children and re-location) was the second reason. Many young social workers were recruited during the past few years and they have remained energetic and committed to fulfilling Child Welfare Service's mission. New CWS social workers are required to attend extensive pre-service training offered through the University of Maryland and the CWS Training Academy. This training takes more than three months to complete and is held in Baltimore.

## AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Health and Human Services and Child Welfare Services advocated an integrated approach to assure the safety and well-being of children, youth and their families. To that end, CWS maintains a large array of professional partnerships and collaborations. Easy access to services was made possible by a variety of specialists from other County programs and agencies.

- County Attorneys co-located with Child Welfare staff, helped to address legal concerns and prepare cases for court.
- The Income Support program assigned and co-located a staff member with CWS. This individual provided medical assistance enrollment for children coming into out-of-home care.
- Six mental health therapists specialized in serving Child Welfare children and their parents. In addition, a mental health professional, funded by the Core Service Agency (CSA) and located at the Child Assessment Center, completed assessments, made recommendations for treatment, and assisted in identifying appropriate mental health resources.
- Representatives of CWS, the County Attorney's Office, Montgomery County Police Department, the State Attorney's Office, and the CAC staff met regularly at the Juvenile Assessment Center in a multidisciplinary team meeting to discuss complex multi-agency cases. The senior managers of those agencies met regularly to discuss the effective operation of the Tree House.
- Maryland Choices developed a program with the Montgomery County Collaboration Council, in which children and youth with intensive needs received a variety of services to prevent Out-of-Home placement. Services included: helping children who have been in group or residential care make the transition back into the community. Programs included home-based therapy, mentoring, specialized services and professional team coordination along with Interagency Family Preservation Services (IFPS) to children in danger of being removed from their home.
- The Metropolitan YMCA implemented a Court-supported, mentoring program which matched more than 25 young people in effective supportive relationships. This was the program's fourth year and it has been highly successful in keeping adolescents in school.
- Children's Action Team (CAT) - a group comprised of juvenile court judges, attorneys, CWS staff and Court administrators developed and implemented an agenda to help speed permanent plans for children. One of their major projects was supporting The Visitation House and improving communication among key participant

## COMMUNITY GIVING

We are very fortunate that the Montgomery County community continued to be supportive in many of our efforts to assist children and families. Several of the larger programs were:

**The Generous Juror Program**, a joint project between the Circuit Court, and Child Welfare Services gave prospective jurors the opportunity to donate their jury fee towards activities to benefit children served by CWS and the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). It continued to be a highly successful program. More than \$96,884 was collected and used to provide opportunities for these children that otherwise would not be covered by state or local funds e.g. camp scholarships, tutoring, holiday arts and sports activities, and birthday and graduation gifts.

**The Adopt-A-Social-Worker Program** received voluntary donations from the community for children and families. Donations were used to provide children with school supplies and also graduation presents for high school seniors. Items donated included: over 1200 pairs of shoes, 335 backpacks filled with school supplies and over 150

“stuff-a-duff” duffle bags filled with items for kids when they are removed from their homes—hygiene products, night shirts, towels, washcloths, etc. In addition, a private citizen collected food for 180 Thanksgiving dinners and another committed member donated 20 photo albums to the Visitation House.

**Community Campaign:** This year the Department worked in partnership with dedicated community volunteers who were interested in developing resources for CWS youth. In a short time, they identified a wish list from staff for CWS youth and then established a “Bank” of goods and services. This included circus and theater tickets along with tickets to various sporting events, food coupons, sleepover bags, and craft supplies. With their support, families and children had opportunities to attend activities and participate in events that are not within the funding capabilities of CWS.

## Partnerships and Collaborations

These are some of the community groups and partners with which Montgomery County Child Welfare Services collaborates:

- *Addiction Services Coordination*
- *Arbor Employment Services*
- *Aunt Hattie's Place*
- *Behavioral Health Partners*
- *Board of Social Services*
- *The Casey Foundation*
- *Center for Adoption Support & Education (C.A.S.E.)*
- *Child Fatality Review Committee*
- *Citizens Review Boards*
- *Citizens Review Panel*
- *Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children*
- *Commission on Children and Youth*
- *Contemporary Therapeutic Services*
- *Council of Governments (COG)*
- *Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)*
- *Department of Juvenile Justice (DJS)*
- *Domestic Violence Alert Team*
- *Early Childhood Workgroup*
- *Family Service Agency*
- *Friends in Action (FIA)*
- *Hearts & Homes for Youth*
- *High Risk Consultation Team*
- *The Home Based Team (HBT)*
- *Homeless Shelter Providers Team*
- *Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC)*
- *Infants & Toddlers Program*
- *Institute for Family Centered Services*
- *Interagency Committee on Adolescent Pregnancy*
- *Interfaith Works*
- *Juvenile Justice Commission*
- *Linkages to Learning*
- *Local Coordinating Team (LCT)*
- *Maryland Choices*
- *Maryland Department of Human Resources (MDDHR)*
- *Maryland Department of Juvenile Services*
- *Maryland Multicultural Youth Center*
- *Mental Health Assoc. of Montgomery County (MHA)*
- *Moms Offering Moms Support (MOMS)*
- *Montgomery County Collaboration Council*
- *Montgomery County Government (DHHS, Housing, Police, Human Resources and County Attorneys)*
- *Montgomery County Public School*
- *Montgomery County Child Care*
- *National Center for Children & Families (NCCF)*
- *Operation Runaway*
- *Primary Care Coalition (PCC)*
- *Reginald Lourie Center*
- *Trawick Foundation*
- *The Tree House, Child Assessment Center (CAC)*
- *University of Maryland School of Social Work*
- *Wells Robertson House (NET Program)*
- *Workforce Solutions*
- *YMCA – Metropolitan YMCA*

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### Montgomery County Child Welfare Services Executive Staff

*Agnes F. Leshner, MA*

*Child Welfare Services Director*

*Vicki Baltimore, Office Services Coordinator*

*Sheila Dennis, LCSW-C*

*Assessment Section Administrator*

*Tasha Robinson, Office Services Coordinator*

*Louise Klein, LCSW-C*

*Continuing Section Administrator*

*Jessica Santos, Office Services Coordinator*

*Angela English, LCSW-C*

*Out of Home Services Administrator*

*Patty Carson, Office Services Coordinator*

*Pat Davis Spann, LGSW*

*Resource Section Administrator*

*Phyllis Reed, Office Services Coordinator*

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Montgomery County Child Welfare Services has four offices. The main office is in Rockville and there are three other regional offices. These offices are co-located with other Montgomery County Government programs.

***Headquarters (Main Office)***

*1301 Piccard Drive,  
Rockville, MD 20850  
Phone: 240-777-3500  
TTY: 240-777-3556*

***Juvenile Assessment Center***

*7300 Calhoun Place, Suite 400  
Rockville, MD 20855  
Phone: 240-777-4435 / 3391  
TTY: 240-777-3560*

***Germantown Regional Services Center***

*12900 Middlebrook Road, 2nd Floor  
Germantown, MD 20874  
Phone: 240-777-1742  
TTY: 240-777-8002*

***Silver Spring Regional Services Center***

*8630 Fenton Street, 10th Floor  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
Phone: 240-777-1438  
TTY: 240-777-4320*